

# RPG Reload File 031 – 'Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic'

[March 26, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



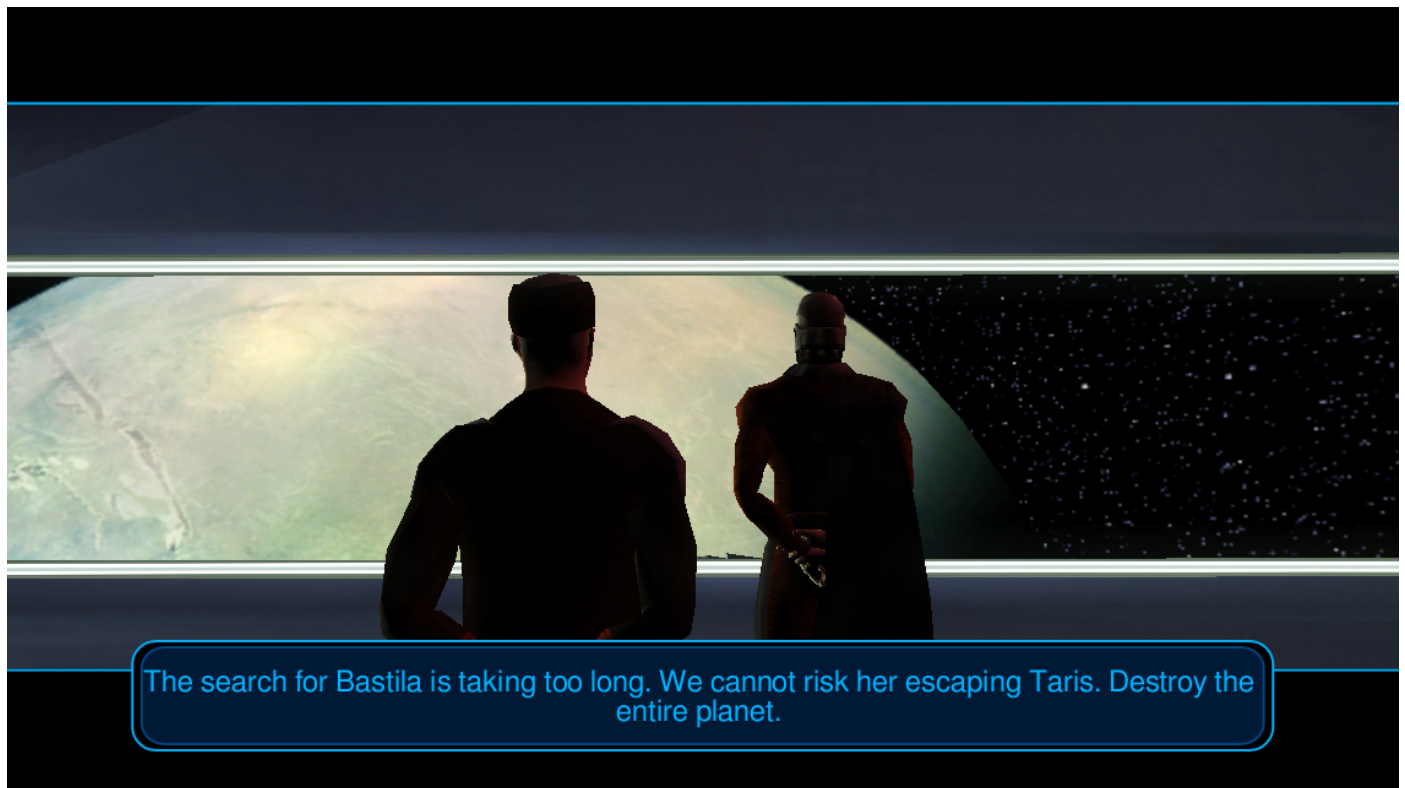
Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we never try to brush a wookiee's teeth. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's huge back catalog. We revisit the game, expand beyond the borders of a typical review, and see how it's doing in the wild future that is today. The RPG genre is an incredibly broad one, and I try to bring a balanced plate from week to week. I want your help with that, however, so once per month, I'll be featuring a game selected by you, the readers. Simply make your selection known by commenting below, posting in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweeting to [@RPGReload](#). Next week's article is one such choice, and will feature *Undercroft* [\(Free\)](#), as selected by TouchArcade forum user DrJD. Thanks Doc, I like to get a physician's opinion once in a while!



This week's featured game represents the second time Canadian RPG developer BioWare has graced the **Reload**, and we'll just have to hope it's not the second-last time. *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* ([\\$9.99](#)) is a significant game for quite a few reasons, in my opinion. First of all, for most console players it was their first experience with a BioWare RPG, with the main *Baldur's Gate* titles being exclusive to home computers. It also represented something of a pivot for the company itself, shifting its focus to satisfying a console audience while simultaneously building strong ties with Microsoft, who would act as their primary console partner until BioWare was purchased by Electronic Arts in 2005. It was also a rare combination of critical and commercial success for an Xbox exclusive, helping carry the console through an otherwise dry summer in 2003. Finally, it would be remiss to not mention its status as one of the best games ever to use the *Star Wars* license. There are other great *Star Wars* games, but few that brought the universe to life the way this one did.

While the game was announced in July of 2000, LucasArts had approached BioWare the year before to discuss the idea. At the time, BioWare only had the original *Baldur's Gate* ([\\$9.99](#)), its expansion, and a couple of decent

action games under their belt, but LucasArts clearly knew what they were doing. LucasArts gave Bioware a couple of choices for the game's setting. The first, and from the perspective of LucasArts probably the more desirable of the two, was to make a game in the world of *Star Wars Episode 2 – Attack Of The Clones*. With the movie well under way, Lucas's company was obviously interested in getting all the required merchandise tie-ins rolling, and video games were a big part of that. The second choice was to take the whole thing 4,000 years back in time, where its events couldn't disrupt any of the continuity George Lucas was trying to put together. BioWare chose the latter for the freedom it would offer them. Let's all say our thanks for that decision.

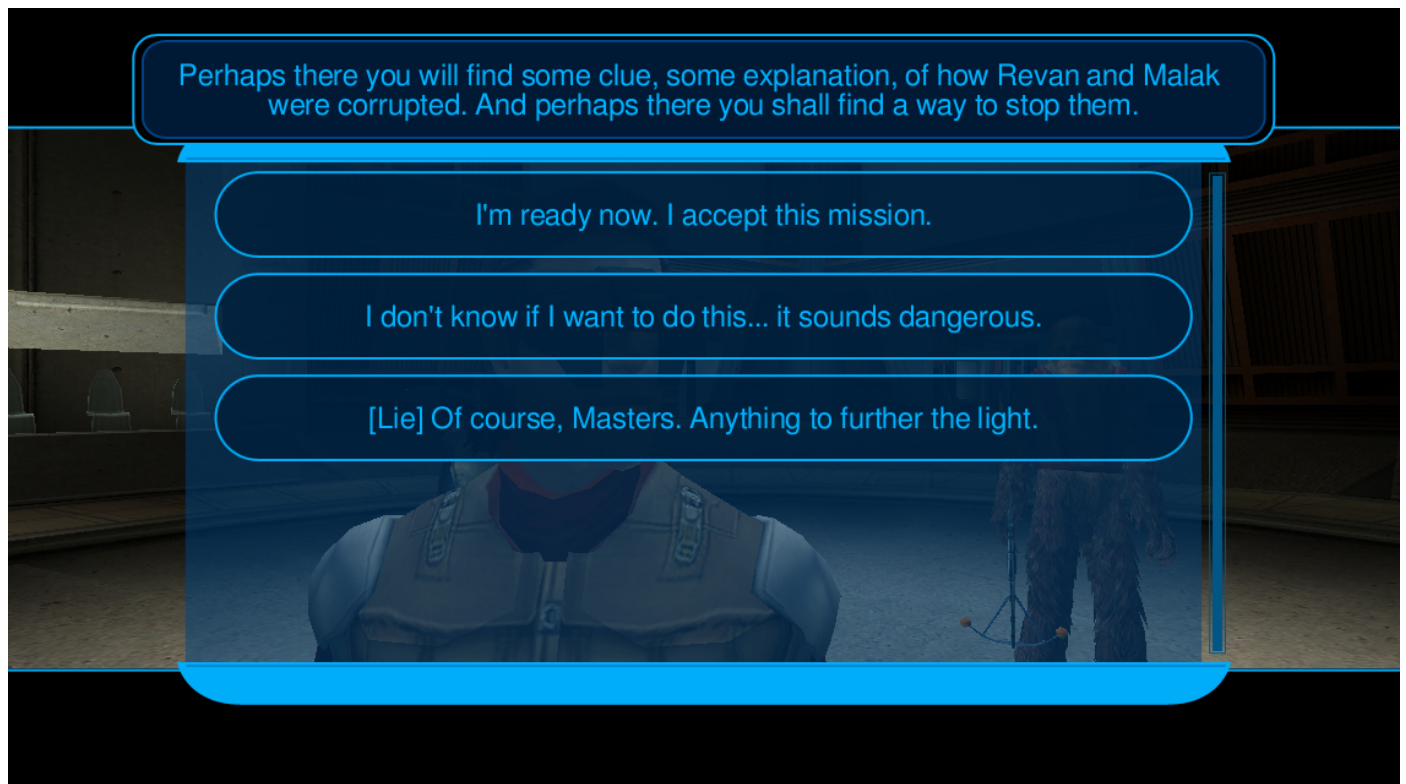


Even temporally displaced as it was, many *Star Wars* fans would argue that BioWare did a better job of honoring the feel and tradition of the *Star Wars* universe than Lucas himself did with *Episode 2*, but that's an argument for another place. You would think 4,000 years is a long time, but the world of the Old Republic feels very familiar. While Palpatine's Empire, the Republic, and the Rebel Alliance were thousands of years away, the Old Republic era fills the roles with suspiciously similar duplicates. What's interesting is that it



feels like shameless calling back and more like laying narrative groundwork. Palpatine's aspirations make more sense after seeing the Sith Empire in action, and the New Republic's foolish pride and subsequent fall is nicely foreshadowed in this game's story.

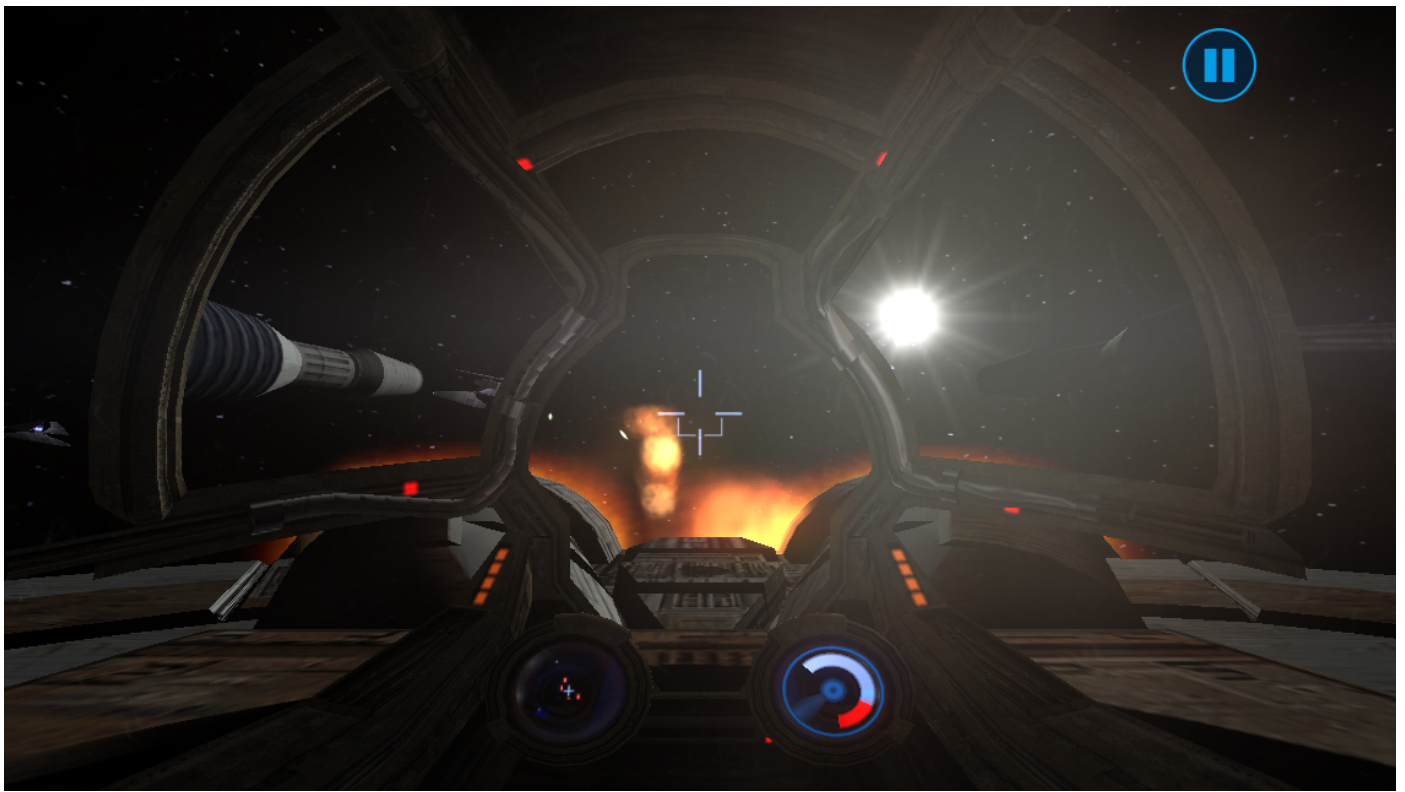
The game had been announced for PC and "next generation consoles", but it ended up only making its way to one of that trio: Microsoft's Xbox. Like a lot of that console's support from Western developers, much of that was owed to the hardware's resemblance to PC architecture. It was fairly easy to port PC code over to the Xbox compared to the more particular designs of the Gamecube and PlayStation 2. I'm sure the fact that every Xbox had a hard drive helped, too. Since the game was built using a modified version of the engine that powered *Neverwinter Nights* on the PC, the Xbox was a natural home for it. It was a wise choice, since the Xbox actually had very few RPGs at the time, and even fewer worth playing. *Knights Of The Old Republic* enjoyed having almost the whole market to itself for a while. When it arrived in July of 2003 it was several months late, but few people cared about that after playing the game.





*Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* was a smash hit right out of the gate, becoming the fastest-selling Xbox game to date at the time of its release. Its subsequent November launch on PC was just as successful, with a Mac port a year later also doing quite well. The game demanded a sequel, and so it got one. Unfortunately, the sequel ended up in the hands of the eternally-cursed Obsidian Entertainment. As was usual for that developer, they didn't actually get the chance to finish the game they were working on, and *Knights Of The Old Republic 2* released to significantly less enthusiasm than the original game. Fans would later mod the PC version to try to cobble together its intended ending, but since that work is unofficial, you'll only be able to enjoy it on your computer. The way the game sort of abruptly ends without proper resolution is likely the chief reason why it hasn't been ported around recently, and it indeed may never be. Quite a shame, because what was finished is excellent.

Interestingly, a third game was in production in-house at LucasArts, cobbled together from the leftover pieces of a failed MMO project called *Proteus*, but it too was quietly canceled during one of the many restructurings LucasArts went through in the 2000s. The setting would return, and in the hands of BioWare no less, in the form of an MMO called *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. It takes place 300 years after the events of the original game, and although it had something of a rocky initial period after its December 2011 launch, it seems to have found its audience and stabilized. It seems unlikely that BioWare will return to the setting for a single-player RPG, especially given the success of their own *Mass Effect* sci-fi series, but who knows what the future might bring?



The iPad version of the game was developed by Aspyr Media, who had previously done the Mac port of the game. It was announced and released in the span of days during May of 2013, and the port received a mostly-positive reception. Several months later, in December of that year, the game was made universal so that iPhone players could enjoy the game as well. An update in March 2014 added MFi controller and iCloud support, and the game even got an update to fix bugs with the iPhone 6 family soon after that hardware's release. All things considered, it's a pretty good port of the game, even on the smaller screens that iPhones sport. That's a big change from its BioWare stablemates on iOS, but I think a lot of that is down to the differences in the original games that happened as a result of targeting the console audience with *Star Wars*. The game is streamlined in many ways and doesn't need to find places for nearly as many buttons.

I suppose that's as good a place as any to start talking about the actual game. You play as a Republic soldier who wakes up as the ship he or she (your choice) is on is being destroyed. You end up fleeing to the surface of a nearby planet that has been locked down by the Sith Empire. From there, your vague goals include getting off the planet and rescuing Bastila, a Jedi

who is of major importance to the Republic. Naturally, these goals end up dovetailing, and you find your way off the planet. The spectre hanging over all of this is Darth Malak, a villainous Sith Lord who took the reins of the Empire after his master, Darth Revan, was killed. He's unleashed a massive attack force on the Republic, and you soon discover the source of much of his power is something called the Star Forge. Finding out what exactly that is, where it is, and how to deal with it involves a lot of planet-hopping and problem-solving.



Most of BioWare's usual tropes are on display here. I think this game was actually instrumental in helping explain their usual morality meter to the masses better than the convoluted *Dungeons & Dragons* system did. The average person won't be able to make much sense out of Lawful Evil and Neutral Good, but frame it as the Light and Dark Sides of the Force and just about everyone understands. Your alignment comes from some of your major actions and decisions, but it's largely influenced by how you behave on side quests. Most dialogues offer choices that allow you to be good, neutral, or downright evil, with some interesting results. This has a tangible result on the tone of the story and completely changes the ending, but it also changes

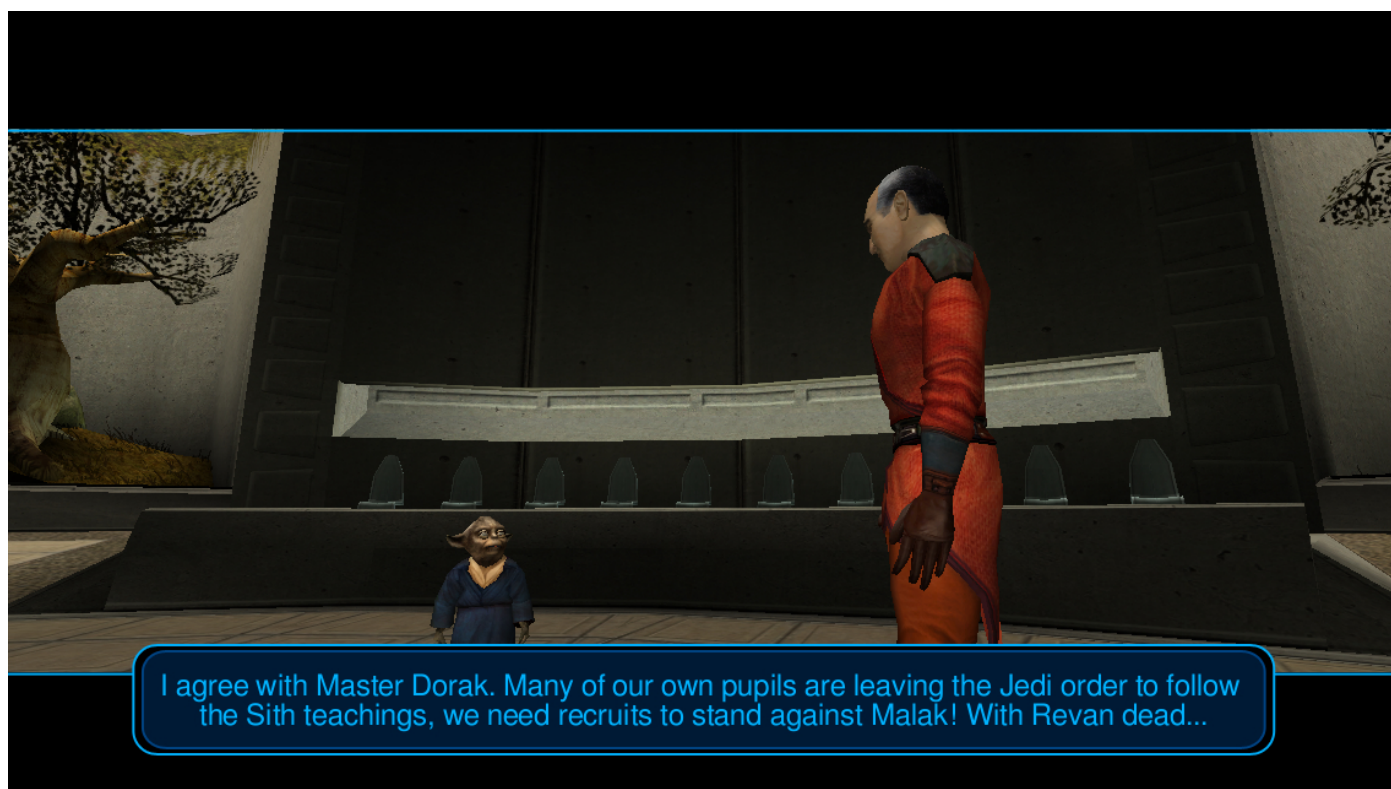


the gameplay as well. This being a good *Star Wars* game, you eventually become a Jedi, and the powers available to you depend greatly on your alignment. Light Jedi get access to healing powers and buffs, while the Dark Jedi get to shoot that cool lightning and choke people. Yeah, it's a tough choice, alright.

You'll also meet a bunch of people who will join your party. Some of them are pretty interesting, like fan favorite evil droid HK-47, while others are Carth. They all have their own stories to tell and their own arcs to follow, but you'll have to interact with them if you want to discover them. Even their fates depend on which path you follow, with some particularly nasty stuff waiting on the Dark Side. No matter which way you go, there are at least a couple of major twists waiting for you, and I'm not ashamed to say that I didn't see one of them coming the first time I played the game. Overall, it's a great story with lots of fun characters and a few forgettable ones. The game is also packed with voice acting, though you'll hear plenty of actors taking on multiple roles. I had honestly remembered it being higher quality than it is, but it's still not that bad. By the standards of its time, it was outstanding.



The adventure spans multiple planets, including some famous ones like Tatooine and the wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk. You'll also visit the Sith home of Korriban in a fairly tense sequence. The order you tackle these worlds in, save the beginning and the ending, is mostly up to you, an aspect that would also regularly appear in most of BioWare's games. It gives a nice illusion of open-endedness while still keeping you on rails to an extent for story-telling purposes. In my opinion, the game takes a bit too long to get up to speed, a frequent problem for this developer. It starts off with a bang on the starship, but the sequence on the opening planet, Taris, drags on way too long. Even worse, most of the time you spend there, you don't have access to a healer, so you have to make sure you keep a large supply of medipacks on hand and use them liberally. In the middle of the Taris section, there's a brief but not very fun swoop race, and the touch controls in this version make that even less enjoyable, and the whole thing caps off with a dull shooting mini-game that really doesn't work well at all using touch. After that, the game's pace picks up quickly and stays pretty steady until the end of the game, so you really just have to soldier through that opening.



As with BioWare's previous titles, *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*

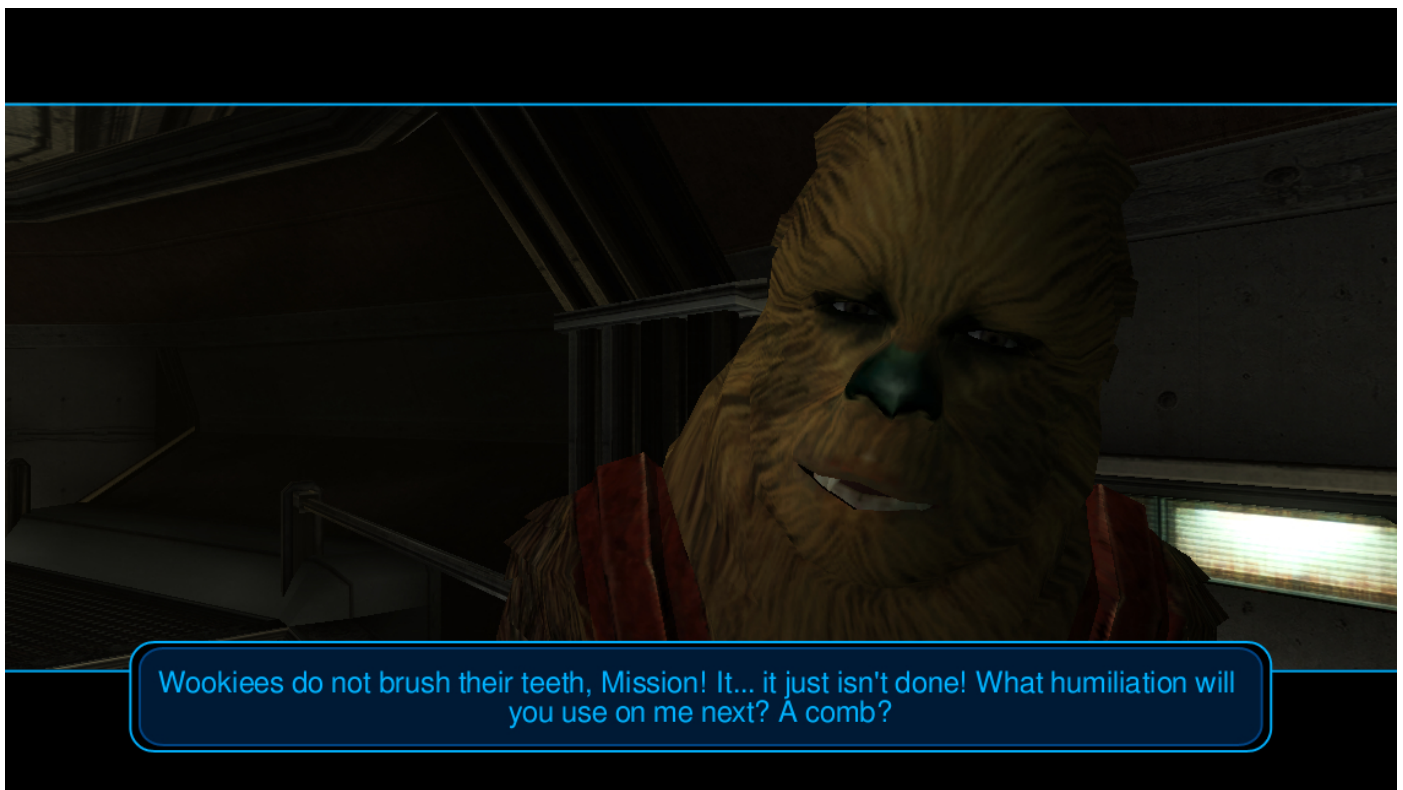
bases its gameplay rules on a pen and paper game. In this case, it's the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* from Wizards Of The Coast, which itself was derived from *Dungeons & Dragons 3.0's* ruleset. What this means is that although the game seems to be playing in real-time, it's actually governed by a turn-based system that uses twenty-sided dice for determining just about everything. Some action game fans might be turned off by how visible actions and the actual outcomes seem disconnected, and indeed that sort of criticism ended up heavily influencing the *Mass Effect* series, but RPG fans ought to be fairly comfortable with it. It's sometimes a little clunky, and things can get a bit troublesome when there are too many targets on the screen, but like most of BioWare's games, you can pause the action to plug in commands for everyone or even just to take a breather. On the whole, it's not a hard game or an especially long one, with the main quest wrapping up in about 30 hours, but there are definitely a few difficulty spikes where you'll end up having to prepare carefully, cheese your way through, or both. The final boss can be especially rocky depending on which path you've taken, and have mercy on you if you've decided to play it neutral, because there's no benefit in that.





Sadly, most of the loot is junk, an affliction that hits far too many RPGs, but *Knights Of The Old Republic* has one advantage most games don't: lightsabers. Once you've become a Jedi, you get to build your own lightsaber, even going so far as choosing the color. Well okay, technically you're choosing your class to start with, but who isn't choosing based on the color of the lightsaber they want? If you don't get the color you like, don't worry, because you can keep on customizing your weapon all the way through. You can even dual-wield lightsabers if you're interested in looking like the coolest person ever. You'll find crystals and parts that allow you to improve your lightsaber and even go purple if you want. So while most of the treasure is garbage, some of the treasure is lightsaber parts, and that's some of the best treasure there is, my friends.

It's been interesting going back to this game, actually. I remember when I first played it. I took my usual two weeks of paid holidays from my job that August, and as usual, I decided to spend it all playing video games. I ran through *Knights Of The Old Republic* from start to finish only taking the smallest of breaks, and I thought it was just about the best thing ever. Of course, like many, I was a bigger *Star Wars* fan then than I am these days, but I think it's hard to deny the quality of this game. It has problems, but I think on the whole it's one of the most well-balanced experiences BioWare has ever put together. Yet for some reason, I never played it again. I always meant to, at least to see the other side of the story, as I had played a total goodie-two-shoes on my first pass, but time has a way of getting away from us. A few years later, I moved to Japan and my Xbox certainly wasn't going to come with me. I was pretty happy when the iOS version released, but again like many of you I'm sure, I bought the game and filed it away for a rainy day that may never have come were it not for this feature.



For my return trip, I decided to play a complete sociopath, and let me tell you, that leads to a lot more dying. It's also pretty fun if your conscience allows you to enjoy it. The Taris section grated even worse this time around knowing exactly how far away from my freedom (and lightsaber) I was at any given time. The difficulty spikes were a bit less spikey since I remembered when most of them were coming, but I had completely forgotten the layouts of the various dungeons, so I had to feel my way around the rather roomy designs that BioWare likes to employ. I didn't like the way that my AI partners would go charging in unless I stopped them first, since they were awfully fond of setting off mines by doing that. I still hate Carth a lot. I always hate Carth. That's the one thing Jedi and Sith can agree on, surely. Hating Carth is the *Breakfast At Tiffany's* of galactic disputes. Once I got into the groove of the game and starting powering up my character, though, I was surprised at how much the game pulled me in again. As I mentioned, I've cooled on *Star Wars*, and it's been a while since I wholeheartedly enjoyed anything BioWare has designed. I had guessed my malaise with the company was a post-*Baldur's Gate 2* ([\\$9.99](#)) thing, but it turns out I'm still cool with this one, too.



Best of all, it somehow fits iOS to a tee. Other than some of the ill-advised mini-games becoming even more ill-advised, the game is quite playable even on an iPhone. The controls work well enough, and saves come in three convenient styles. The game will auto-save when you enter a new area, but that can sometimes be a long gap of time, so be careful. You can also do a quicksave at the tap of an icon, or make a ton of separate save files through the menu. The game even supports iCloud, like every decent game ought to. You can jump between your iPhone and iPad as you see fit, or if you're running low on device memory, you can delete it without worrying about losing everything. Yes, things are a bit more cramped on the smaller screen, and a few of the menu buttons don't seem to realize how small they are, but on the whole, it's far more playable than any of the Infinity Engine ports. It's a real battery-sucker, though, so be careful about that. I just about ran my device dead playing it a few times without realizing it.

All in all, this is still an excellent game that suits casual RPG fans and more hardcore ones alike. It's probably one of the easiest games to recommend in the genre on iOS due to its wide appeal. While it has some pacing issues and the balance is sometimes a bit funky, the overall experience is more than



worth it. That goes double if you've never played it before. I'm not going to call this BioWare's best game, but I think I will gladly throw my chips on it being their most-beloved one. I'll grant that part of its charm comes from my having affection for the Star Wars universe at some point in my life, but it's hard to imagine there are that many people out there that that doesn't apply to. I think this is easily among the best *Star Wars* video games, and simply taken on its own as an RPG, it's still very strong even after all these years.



That's just my take on *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*, however. What do you guys think? Great game, great port, both, neither, 42? Whatever you've got to say, I want to hear it, so please comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums, or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). As for me, I'll be back next week with Undercroft, and if the stars align correctly, you should have another episode of the **RPG Reload Podcast** to enjoy pretty soon as well. Thanks for reading!

**Next Week's Reload Hint:** *Hint nothing, it's Undercroft!*